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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the processes of cultural assimilation and identity transformation experienced by Hispanic Americans. The process of acculturation for Hispanics in the United States, which requires adaptation to a different set of cultural, societal, and racial/ethnic demands, is explored by using a paradigm model. The conceptual paradigm model presented in this paper attempts to explain the process of adaptation that Hispanics go through to become part of Anglo-American society. The assimilation process is described as a multi-dimensional, staged process, characterized by both accommodation to Anglo-American culture and retention of the native culture of origin. The following stages of adaptation in the assimilation process which create specific phases necessitating specific adjustments for Hispanics are described: (1) shocked stage; (2) unsure stage; (3) skidder stage; and (4) adapted stage. A bibliography with 27 references is included, along with a glossary which defines 13 terms used in this paper. Three figures are included. (JS)

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THE CULTURAL ASSIMILATION AND IDENTITY TRANSFORMATION OF HISPANICS: A CONCEPTUAL PARADIGM

by Jose A. Quiles

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The cultural behavior of Hispanics as a group, that is, the extent to which Hispanic individuals have taken on the values and behavior patterns of the dominant Anglo-American culture, continues to be misunderstood or has received little thoughtful attention. The perception that emerges in the public mind in regards to Hispanics is characterized by a collection of stereotypic generalizations and half-truths

Descendants of Euro-ethnic groups make-up today the majority of people known as Anglo-Americans. A large number of Anglo-Americans still assume that anyone who looks different from them is a foreigner, distinct from the assimilated Euro-ethnics who for the most arrived in America as foreigners. Historically this group has been taught little or nothing about America's ethnic diversity. Anglo-Americans have naively perpetuated the teneous notion of the "American melting pot" disregarding the multiethnic nature of the American society (Glazer & Moynihan, 1970). Even today, the level of ignorance about America's ethnic diversity is pervasive.

The history of other ethnic groups in general and the Hispanic group in particular is superficially touched if at all, and the prevailing attitude continues to be that America is an "Anglo" society (Mercer, 1971). The myth of the "melting pot" lives on, trapping its' adherents in the belief that their values and perceptual sets are universal and fully applicable to all. Anglo-Americans become inflexible to other alternatives and resisting informatinon

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and eventual adaptation to other views, are trapped by the boundaries of their particular belief system.

In recent years, America's racial and ethnic diversity has received considerable attention by social commentators and the press. Time magazine in July 1985 published a special issue on America's "Immigrants"; the New York Times has published numerous articles addressing different minority groups. In July 1988, Time magazine again published a special section entitled: "Magnifico: Hispanic culture breaks out of the barrio"; Training magazine, in their May 1988 issue published an article entitled: "Learning to manage a multicultural workforce". The fact is, however, that twenty-five years ago, more than half of all immigrants came from Europe and Canada. Today, newcomers to America are from various racial and ethnic groups other than Euro-ethnics, and among them are large numbers of Hispanics. It is becoming clear that the new face of America mirroring the new immigrant wave, has a darker complexion and diverse accents. This trend is expected to continue well into the future (Macias, 1977).

Although a new awareness as exemplified by media coverage is slowly emerging about the multiplicity of racial and ethnic groups in America, little is known about the dynamics of cultural assimilation and identity transformation of these groups. This situation exists irregardless of the fact that one of these groups, Hispanics, have been here for centuries (Novak, 1973). Before the Pilgrims arrived on the Mayflower, Mexicans were already residents of Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, California, and other areas of the Southwest; Spanish conquistadores had set foot and established settlements in Florida and Louisiana (Barrera, 1979).

Today the concentration of Hispanics is most evident in urban areas.

Hispanics represent sizable proportions of many metropolitan populations: 64% in Miami(Cuban-Americans), 55% in San Antonio(Mexican-Americans), 33% in Los Angeles(Mexicans & Latin-Americans), 35% in New York City(Puerto Ricans & Latin-Americans), 20% in Hartford(Puerto Ricans), and so on. By the year 2000 it is estimated that Hispanics will constitute about 13% of the total U.S. population (ACE Report, 1988)

It may only be a slight exaggeration to state that in articulating the nature of the socio-psychological problems faced by Hispanics in American society, the effort proceeds like a race horse galloping along with blinders. It doesn't know where it's been, it doesn't know where it is, and it doesn't know where it is going (Ferguson, 1980). However, the general assumption is that progress is being made toward understanding this ethnic group irregardless of the lack of evidence to support such a claim.

HISPANICS

According to Ruiz and Padilla (1977), the term "Hispanic" is gradually replacing the synonym "Latino", which was defined as a generic label including all people of Spanish origin and their descendants in the United States. The term Hispanic will be used in this paper to identify all Spanish-speaking groups. However, the term will not be used to present the Hispanic group as composed of homogeneous individuals having the same set of problems and aspirations. On the contrary, the term should be understood as representing an aggregate of different Hispanic subgroups in the United States with different "sub-cultural" and political experiences among them. Thus, as used here, Hispanic means a person from Spain, the Caribbean, Central and South America, and their descendants now living in the United States. The term also denotes

ethnicity ("Spanish origin", language skills ("Spanish-speaking), family name ("Spanish surmane"), ancestry ("Spanish-American") or nationality (such as Cuban, Dominican, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Spaniard, and so on). Certain groups of Euro-ethnics in Latin America such as the various white ethnics in Costa Rica and Argentina, who do not identify themselves as Hispanics, would not be included in this definition. Other national groups such as Brazilians, Italians, French, and Portuguese will also be excluded from this definition. The main thrust of the Hispanic definition as used in this paper is to recognize the Spanish-African-Indian-Mestizo strain that identifies the members of this "ethnic" group. The term "ethnic" will identify the socio-cultural heritage related to customs, language, religion, and habits passed on from one generation to the next.

Hispanics, as an ethnic group, possess a distinctive cultural heritage which define a way of life. In general, this particular way of life expresses itself by definite geographical areas (nations or territories), and in activities and traditions which enable these Hispanic groups to secure their well being. The patterns of human interaction and experience which constitute the daily life of Hispanics, are also important factors which define their culture and society (Abalos, 1986). In the context of that society, they share their culture with others according to commonly held values and acceptable norms. Through these interactions all members of a particular Hispanic society establish a cultural identity. This in turn, gives meaning to who they are, where they belong, and what their life and actions mean (Linton, 1945).

A major problem of adaptation faced by a large number of Hispanics who immigrate from their society and into the Anglo-American arena, with a different way of life and institutions, is to establish a new cultural

identity. That is to say, to adjust themselves to new forms of socio-psychological interactions, and to adapt to a new way of life. This process of adaptation is called acculturation (Marsella et al., 1979). Acculturation for Hispanics in the United States requires adaptation to a different set of cultural, societal, and racial/ethnic demands. Acculturation, as described above, facilitates what has been labeled as cultural assimilation. Both terms, acculturation and cultural assimilation are very similar in meaning, defining the dynamics and outcomes that immigrants undertake as they cope with the demands of a new society.

Cultural assimilation refers to the extent to which individuals enter and become part of a new society. The process of cultural assimilation, therefore, transcends individual motivation and includes the new society's degree of "acceptance" of the newcomer. Cultural assimilation may be defined as the gradual process whereby different cultures, individuals, and groups are merged into a homogeneous social unit. Cultural differences, in theory at least, are minimized and tend to disappear. The degree of cultural assimilation for any given Hispanic group in the United States depends both on the motivation of its members to enter the Anglo-American culture as on the extent to which members of the Anglo-American culture welcome, or prevent, the entrance of these individuals into the majority Anglo-American culture (Pedersen, 1988).

THE CONCEPTUAL PARADIGM

A paradigm (from a Greek root meaning, pattern) is a framework in which one's views of reality as expressed by one's thoughts, perceptions, and values can be organized (Wallace, 1970). The development of a paradigm involves a process of working out the implications of a set of assumptions and

observations toward solving a type of problem or explaining some other phenomena. This process of working out can be conceptualized as a vision we have of reality (Kuhn, 1970). In this paper, a major assumption is made that in the American society the view of life should account for the interrelatedness and interdependence of all elements in the system - environmental, psychological, social, and cultural. Other assumptions in the paradigm put the emphasis on the reality of relationships between parts rather than on isolated segments of the society. Included in these assumptions are: the acceptance of the inherent human dynamics that occur in relationships; the existence of a process of thinking and planning; the evidence of pronounce levels of subjectivity in decision making, and the efforts of people toward maintaining their influence and autonomy (Reason & Rowan, 1984). It is observed that all these assumptions serve to influence the generation and interpretation of knowledge in a given society. This denotes an all encompassing set of beliefs that describe implicit and explicit views of socio-cultural reality.

The paradigm model presented in this paper attempts to explain the process of adaptation that Hispanics go through to become part of Anglo-American society. The model has been developed from certain theoretical assumptions about how Hispanics, as members of a distinct ethnic group, go about engaging in American society, both from a cultural and psychological perspective (Schlossberg, 1981).

The paradigm seeks to explain extant observations related to conditions that are present in the experience of Hispanics as they proceed to acculturation and assimilation. Different stages in the assimilation process will be described which create specific phases necesitating specific

adjustments for Hispanics. These conditions and adjustments exacerbate stresses and conflicts found by Hispanics in the new socio-cultural context.

THE ASSIMILATION PROCESS

In Anglo-American society members of different minority groups are exposed to a complex matrix of heterogeneous cultural influences and expectations. Usually, a central assumption made about those who are most successful in negotiating and coping with the socio-cultural demands made by the new society, is that they have learned to interface effectively and strategically within the various socio-cultural environments. Effective coping in the new society requires the ability to handle sets of liabilities and assets, rules and procedures, responsibilities and rights, and rewards and sanctions expected for success (Wallace, 1970).

A major concern in the effective adaptation of Hispanics to Anglo-American society is the process of trans-cultural existence which creates situations defined by a seemingly incompatible set of values, expectations, and demands. The traditional ethnic adaptation theories that have been developed apply more to the dominant Euro-ethnic cultural groups than to the emergent ethnic minority groups. The aim in this paper is to provide a stage-process description of the problems and challenges that acculturation and cultural assimilation create for Hispanics in American society. The major issue is to understand the difficulties found in these processes (Jantsch & Waddington, 1976).

The socio-cultural experience of Hispanics in the United States clearly indicates that the assimilation process most often results in the disruption of traditional modalities of behavior and the difficulty of their day to day

expression. The important role of any culture is that in organizing the meaning that life and human activity have for a person, it enables the person to establish a definition of self (Szapocznik & Kurtiner, 1980). As members of a Hispanic society, individuals define their personhood by references to the values and expectations of fellow members. If these expectations and values suddenly change, identity disruptions occur in the individual. These abrupt changes in cultural meaning are experienced most sharply at the moment of immersion into a new society. Immersion into Anglo-American society imposes pressures on individuals to move rapidly into a way of life different from the one that they are used to. The new Anglo-American setting creates cultural inconsistencies that are not easy to understand or resolve. Asking individuals to immediately adopt a new culture is tartamount to asking them to become someone else (Fitzpatrick, 1971). A re-definition of identity is one of the most difficult and least understood aspects of the cultural adaptation for Hispanics in Anglo-American society.

The model of assimilation usually accepted in the Anglo-American society is based on the traditional view which holds that assimilation is a linear, one-dimensional process. This one-dimensional process (as illustrated in Figure # 1) involves the eventful full accommodation on the part of the newcomer (in this case, Hispanics) to the majority culture. More modern views, however, suggest that assimilation may not necessarily be a linear, one-dimensional process, but rather may occur along a stage-process which includes the interaction between dominant Anglo-American and Hispanic cultural dimensions. The paradigm model of assimilation behaviors among Hispanics to be presented here uses these more modern perspectives (Brislin et al., 1986). Assimilation is viewed as a complex process of adjustment and adaptation to a

total majority cultural context, that could be either one-dimensional or multi-dimensional, depending upon the degree of psycho-social transformation that takes place or on the existential needs experienced by individuals in the new socio-cultural context.

Figure # 1: Linear Process of Assimilation

In-put	Conversion Process	Results	Out-put
(1) Immigrant------)	(2) Melting Pot------)	(3) Assimilation------)	(4) American

The paradigm (as presented in Figure # 2) suggests that the nature of the relationship between the individual's assimilation process and the degree of plurality in the society has important implications for the psychosocial behavior of Hispanics. The assimilation of Hispanics to Anglo-American society can be better explained using a conceptual framework called bicultural parallelism. According to bicultural parallelism, individuals living in a potentially bicultural or multicultural context, will tend to become maladjusted when they try to remain monocultural (Padilla, 1980). Conversely, individuals who enter a monocultural context, the Anglo-American society, and who under-assimilate (that is, fail to learn how to, or do not want to interact within the dominant monocultural context) do not develop the necessary flexibility to cope with the new society effectively. Individuals who over-assimilate (that is, reject or give away the socio-cultural skills necessary to interact with their native ethnic group) experience a period of cultural identity disequilibrium that may lead to psycho-social maladjustment.

In order to avoid identity disequilibrium and possible maladjustment

while in the process of adaptation to a new culture, individuals may attempt to become bicultural. It is suggested that the process of becoming bicultural involves learning and functioning in two different cultural contexts, each with a separate set of rules, demands, and expectations (Brislin et al., 1975). Generally, it is believed that a state of bicultural parallelism eventually involves adaptation to the new culture and appears to be particularly important in facilitating cultural identity adjustment as well. Moreover, bicultural parallelism would tend to facilitate a psychp-social transition period which might aid Hispanics in the process of assimilation into the new culture.

The assimilation process presented here so far proposes that cultural adjustment is multidimensional and functions differently depending upon particular societal conditions. Under certain conditions, such as the expectation of integration to a monocultural context, the process of assimilation will be basically one-dimensional and linear. That is, moving from the culture of origin and native ethnic group into the dominant group of the new society, as illustrated by Figure # 1. However, under other conditions, such as the expectations of functioning in a bicultural context, the process of assimilation provides the probability of being two-dimensional and possessing multiple stages which permit an accommodation to the new society as well as for retaining a functional membership in the native ethnic group. The assimilation paradigm that will be described also recognizes the existence of normative components, which are closely related to the amount and type of exposure to the new social context, such as identity with and the support received from the new social system.

STAGES OF ADAPTATION

The QUILES "Z" EFFECT or the SUSA MODEL (meaning, Shocked, Unsure, Skidder, Adapted), attempts to describe conceptually the stages and patterns an Hispanic newcomer to the Anglo-American society encounters while adapting to the new system. See Figure # 2 :

Insert Figure 2 about here

SHOCKED STAGE

Quadrant 1: SHOCKED Stage - describes the initial entry into the new social system. "Shock or culture shock" is the feeling of impotence on the part of newcomers who cannot deal competently with the environment owning to unfamiliarity with cognitive and behavioral aspects of the new culture and the inability to perform the necessary role-playing skills (Adler, 1975). The specific symptoms of "culture shock" focus either on dissatisfaction with the new culture or idealization of the native culture. Feeling "culture shock" is likely to last over an extended period of time beyond the initial adjustment to the new social system. As familiar cues are replaced by unfamiliar cues the individual experiences a genuine identity crisis, requiring either that the former identity be disowned or that multiple identities for each of the several cultural demands encountered be created and maintained. In this process of adjustment, the individual is required to reintegrate, confront, and challenge the basic underlying assumptions of his identity.

Being "shocked" represents a process composed of the following five substages that an immigrant faces when entering the new system: (a) the feeling of excitment or euphoria about the new/different culture (for our purpose here, the Anglo-American culture); (b) daily activities appear as crisis, charged with uneasy feelings; at this substage the immigrant shows psychological changes and personal transitions while adjusting from the native culture to the new culture; (c) the individual gains understanding about the new culture and begins to feel more confortable with self; (d) the new culture is viewed as providing both positive and negative options in the adaptation process; and (e) ambivalent feelings are present on how to proceed - to go back to the native culture or to go forward into the new culture. Additionally, two other patterns of adaptation compete and create conflicts during the Shocked stage (See Figure # 3): (1) Emanation - (from the Latin root meaning, to flow out) creates a behavioral force which attempts to move the individual forward or to allow the person to proceed from its source of origin; (2) Subjection - (from the Latin root meaning, to throw under) creates a psychological counterforce that imposes feelings of obedience or allegiance on the individual to the essential nature of something that has distinctive value and attributes - the original ethnic group and culture. Usually, the individual in the Shocked stage experiences low support from and low identity with the new culture or social system.

Hispanics in this group could be defined as "new immigrants", who come to the United States looking for better opportunities for their family and children. Overwhelmingly, members of this group are monolingual and monocultural, that is, Hispanic culture dominant. The disposition of individuals in this group toward assimilation is unclear. Many find themselves

experiencing internal and external conflicts while in the process of early acculturation.

Insert Figure 3 about here

UNSURE STAGE

Quadrant 2: UNSURE Stage - in this stage the individual has passed through the shocked stage and now experiences doubt and ambivalence about the future. Two different patterns of adaptation will surface during the UNSURE stage (see Figure # 3): (3) Isolation - (from a Latin root meaning, separate or alone) creates a behavioral force that brings feelings of being separated or set apart from one's ethnic and cultural group, and (4) Buffering - (English word meaning, a soft body when struck) creates a psychological counterforce that tends to protect the individual by moderating adverse pressures or influences. Buffering allows the individual the risk to pursue social mobility and acceptance in the new system. Often the behavioral and psychological dynamics occurring in the Shocked and Unsure stages for the individual may create a condition of sliding back and forth between Quadrant 2 and Quadrant 1. Individuals who remain ambivalent and feel a strong sense of isolation in the Unsure stage are likely to feel uncertain and withdrawn, and often may opt for returning to their native lands. Although at the Unsure stage individuals may be experiencing some moderate to low levels of support from the new culture or social system, at this stage they may have only achieved low to moderate degrees of identity with the new society or system,

which makes the decision to leave more available and acceptable.

The cultural orientation of Hispanics in this group is strongly based on their Hispanic heritage, although they seem to wish more understanding and knowledge about the dominant Anglo-American group. Many of these individuals immigrate to the United States searching for better jobs and educational opportunities. These individuals are functionally oriented toward their Hispanic culture, but are experiencing the initial stage of cultural assimilation into the dominant Anglo-American society.

SKIDDER STAGE

Quadrant 3: SKIDDER Stage - (a word from the field of anthropology meaning, sliding or moving between) describes a stage of significant transition from the native culture to the new and different culture. The Skidder is defined as an individual who is sliding or moving between two cultural domains, not yet fully a member of the new group, and still ambivalent about abandoning the confort and familiarity of his own native ethnic group. The Skidder stage appears to confirm findings in cross-cultural research which indicates that length of exposure to a majority culture creates a progressive and normative process of assimilation for minority group members (Marsella et al., 1979; Triandis et al., 1972). The Skidder stage also suggests that the nature of the relationship between the individuals' assimilation process (in this case, the nature of support from or identity with the new culture/social system) and the degree of acceptance of cultural plurality in the society have important implications for the psychological behavior and performance of Hispanics in the new social context. Again, two patterns of adaptation are experienced in the Skidder stage (See Figure # 3):

(5) Incoherence - meaning a behavioral state of being unable to think or express one's thoughts in a clear or orderly manner, appearing disoriented and unconnected; and (6) Bargaining - (from a French root meaning, haggle in the market) which creates a psychological disposition to engage in contractual exchanges which appear desirable or advantageous. Often individuals in the Skidder stage exhibit strong tendencies or willingness toward total assimilation. At times, however, there are brief periods of "skidding" back and forth between the Unsure stage (Quadrant 2) and the Skidder stage (Quadrant 3). Individuals who are successful in the bargaining pattern often use their feeling of identity with the social system and the support the social system is willing to provide, to move on to the Adapted stage (Quadrant 4) [Lasierra, 1981]. Most Skidders become advocates of the social system and through assimilation become loyal to the cultural tenets of the new society.

Usually, Hispanics in this group are attracted to other Hispanics and take active part in Hispanic social and cultural activities. Generally, their mastery of the English language is better than their mastery of the Spanish language. However, their bilingual/bicultural skills provide them with opportunities to function confortably in both the dominant Anglo-American and the Hispanic cultures. Often, members of this group are in moderate to high stages of assimilation, but many also opt for pursuing a bicultural life style for themselves.

ADAPTED STAGE

Quadrant 4: ADAPTED Stage - (from a Latin root meaning, to fit) describes a state of adjustment of an individual or group to new or modified cultural/social conditions. The Adapted stage provides high degrees of

integration for the individual, with both the capacity to adapt oneself to the social reality of the society plus having the alternative to make critical choices as an equal member of the society. There are again two competing patterns in the Adapted stage (See Figure # 3): (7) Management - which means the act to control or direct the performance of something, and (8) Transformation - which is defined as the change or replacement of the form, nature, or function of behavior and appearance. Cultural assimilation at the Adapted stage is considered quite complete. The individual's support from and identity with the social system is very strong. Most Adapted ethnic group members eventually do not relate or identify strongly with their native culture, rather their cultural referent group has become the Anglo-American culture. Hispanics in the Adapted stage will exhibit monolingual skills in English (meaning, dominant in the native language of their adopted society) and will be monocultural (meaning, dominant in the cultural norms and values of their adopted society), with little knowledge of their ethnic group's language and culture.

For Hispanics in this group, English is their native and only language. They do not identify with or participate in any Hispanic cultural activities. They function as other Americans do and when they come from deprived backgrounds, they present the usual problems that any other American in equal circumstances presents. These Hispanics are monocultural and monolingual, with a cultural and language orientation based on the dominant Anglo-American group.

SUMMARY

The paradigm model proposed that the cultural assimilation process

follows a multi-dimensional continuum which functions differently depending upon the interaction between the individual and the environmental conditions of the new societal context. The stage-process model also holds that assimilation can be one-dimensional and linear depending upon the status of the ethnic group. For racial/ethnic groups similar to the dominant Anglo-American society, assimilation will follow a one-dimensional, linear process. Under other conditions which may involve an Hispanic ethnic group, which has a different language and culture as well as being racially distinct, the assimilation process will be multi-dimensional, staged-process, characterized by both an accommodation to Anglo-American culture and retention of the native culture of origin. The model explicitly recognizes a normative component of assimilation which has specific behavioral patterns of adaptation. These patterns of assimilation are closely related to the amount and type of exposure to support from and identity with the new social context. At each stage of adaptation in the model a counterforce interacts with a normative component that operates in the process of cultural assimilation and identity transformation of Hispanics.

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GLOSSARY

Adapted - Latin, "ad" (to) + "aptare" (to fit) : An alteration or change in behavior of an individual or group in adjustment to new or modified cultural/social surroundings.

Assimilation - Latin, "ad" (to) + "simulare" (to make similar) : The process whereby an individual or a group, as a minority or immigrant group, gradually adopts the dominant characteristicsof another culture.

Bargaining - French, "gargainier" (haggle in the market) : The terms or conditions of a contract or agreement which appear advantagious in an exchange.

Buffering - English, "buffe" (a soft body when struck) : Something that protects by intercepting or moderating adverse pressures or influences, or mediates between two rival forces, lessening the danger of conflict.

Emanation - Latin, "ex" (out) + "emanare" (to flow) : To come forth or proceed from its source of origin or issues from a source.

Incoherence - Unable to think or express one's thoughts in a clear or orderly manner, appearing disordered and unconnected.

Isolation - Latin, "insulatus" : To separate from a group or whole and set apart.

Management - Latin, "manidiare" : To direct or control by the act, manner, or practice of managing, handling the performance of something.

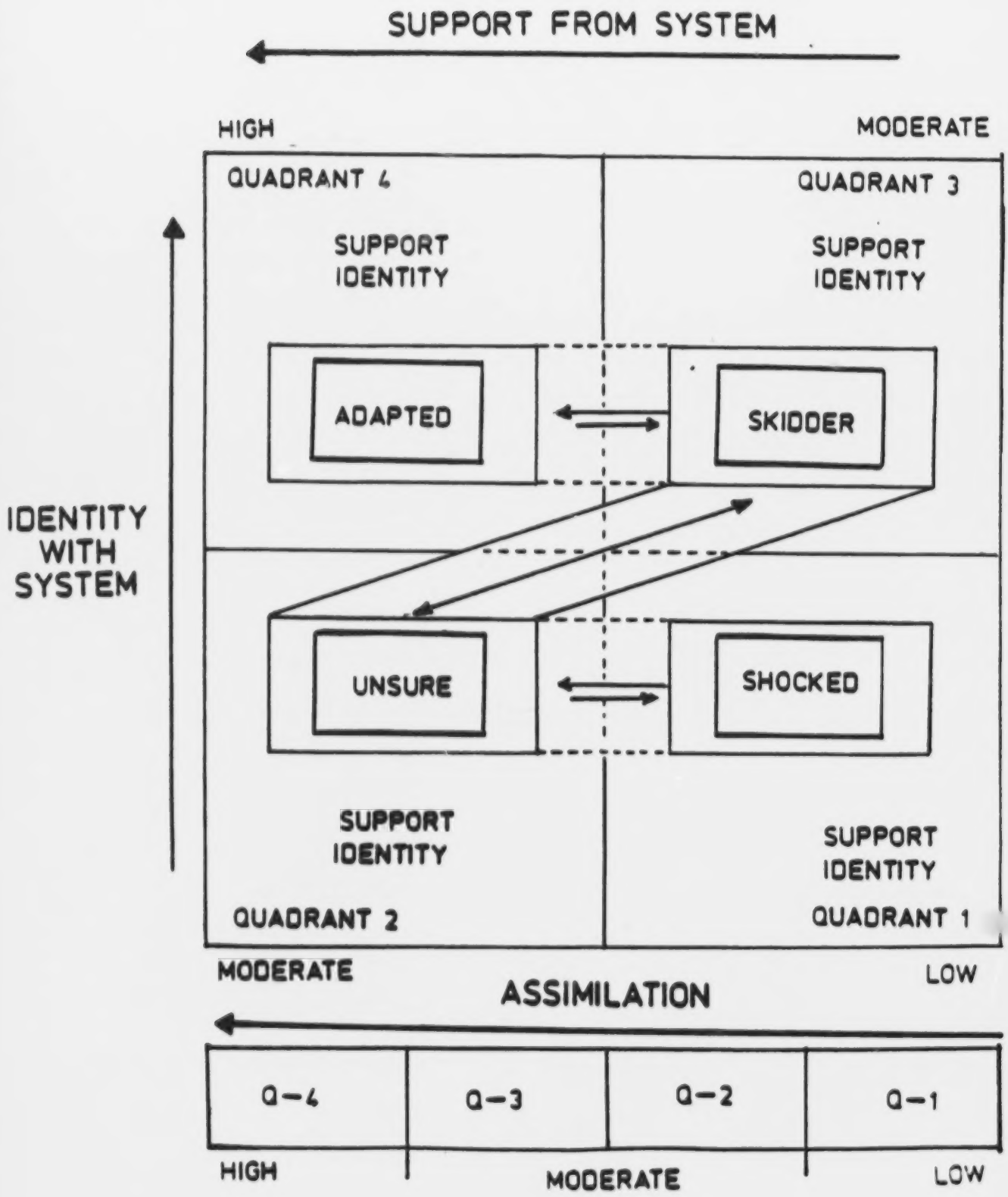
Shocked - French, "choc" (to strike with fear) : A disturbance of function, emotional disequilibrium of mental faculties caused by the impact of something new or unexpected.

Skidder - Sliding or moving between two cultural domains, not yet fully a member of a majority group, and still ambivalent about abandoning the confort and familiarity of the minority ethnic group.

Subjection - Latin, "sub" (under) + "jacere" (to throw) : Under the power or obedience or allegiance to the essential nature or substance of something as distinguished from its attributes.

Transformation - To change or replace markedly the form, nature, function, or condition of behavior and appearance.

Unsure - Latin, "se" (without) + "cura" (care) : Doubtful, wavering, or uncertain about expectations or future possibilities.



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